

PLATTSBURGH AIR FORCE BASE,
CREW READINESS BUILDING
(Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Building No. 2895)
Perimeter Road and Florida Street
Plattsburgh
Clinton County
New York

HAER No. NY-326-B

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

PLATTSBURGH AIR FORCE BASE CREW READINESS FACILITY (Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Building No. 2895)

HAER No. NY-326-B

Location: Perimeter Road and Florida Street, Plattsburgh, Clinton County,
New York

UTM: 18. 621440.4947140
Quad: Plattsburgh, NY-VT, 1:24,000 (1966)

Date of Construction: 1959

Architect: Leo A. Daly Company, Omaha, Nebraska

Present Owner: United States Air Force

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: This building is an element of the SAC Alert Area, which once consisted of a self-contained complex of high security buildings, fences, gates, and towers. During the Cold War, Building No. 2895 housed operational, administrative, residential, and recreational functions for bomber and tanker personnel on 24-hour alert status. The building displays a number of architectural characteristics indicative of Crew Readiness facilities constructed at SAC installations across the United States during the Cold War era. These features include a subterranean lower level and a number of covered, insulated tunnels or ramps used for rapid access to aircraft parked on the alert apron.

Project Information: Building No. 2895 at Plattsburgh AFB is being documented in accordance with HAER standards to mitigate for the potential adverse effects of transferring deed of title to the property from federal ownership. The property transfer is a result of the disposal and reuse of Plattsburgh AFB, pursuant to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1993. The mitigation is a stipulation of a Programmatic Agreement (PA) among the U.S. Air Force, the New York State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (October 2000).

Paige Peyton
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Summary Description of Crew Readiness Facility (Building 2895)

Layout

Situated at the northeast end of the airfield, the Plattsburgh AFB Crew Readiness Facility is a two-story, reinforced concrete block building with a concrete foundation and a slightly pitched roof. The building is rectangular in plan, with a ground floor that measures approximately 243 feet by 78 feet and that is obscured by a grass-covered earthen berm that surrounds the building. The berm was designed for soundproofing and for limited protection from possible attack. The second story is smaller and measures approximately 156 feet by 78 feet. Metal shed roofs extend off the north and south sides of this level.

Several unique features are indicative of this Cold War-era building type, including 18 large, insulated, corrugated metal exit/entrance tunnels that extend off the building's façades. The ends of the tunnels (farthest from the building) are enclosed by a small concrete wall containing double personnel doors. Ten of the tunnels lead into the ground floor level and are partially obscured by the earthen berm. The remaining eight tunnels lead to the second floor level and are above the berm. All have metal ventilators and are covered on the interior with sprayed-on urethane insulation for the protection from inclement weather conditions.

The west façade fronts the airfield (historically the alert apron) and has six personnel exit tunnels. Tunnels 3, 4, and 5 lead to the ground floor level; tunnels 12, 13, and 14 lead to the first floor level. Tunnels 5 and 14 and tunnels 4 and 12 abut one another. These paired tunnels share a common retaining wall, with two sets of doors leading into each tunnel. The remainder of this façade displays three picture windows on the first level, one each flanking tunnel 14 and the third left of tunnel 13. Originally the facility was constructed without windows; all of the windows were added in the 1980s.

The north façade has three personnel exit tunnels. Tunnel 15, the center tunnel, leads to the first floor level, while tunnels 6 and 7 (mostly obscured by the earthen berm) lead to the ground floor level. A two-light picture window is right of the tunnels.

The east façade has six personnel exit tunnels. Tunnels 8, 9, and 10 are mostly obscured by the earthen berm and lead to the ground floor level. Tunnels 16, 17, and 18 lead to the first floor. Adjacent to tunnel 18, at the south end of the first floor level, there is a redwood sundeck accessed by a set of double doors in the dining room. The northernmost tunnel on this façade is adjacent to an open metal stairway that leads to the guard booth on the roof.

There are three personnel exit tunnels on the south façade. The center tunnel (tunnel 11) leads to the first floor level; tunnels 1 and 2, lead to the ground floor level and are nearly obscured by the earthen berm. A portion of the redwood sundeck extends off the east façade; however, the remainder of this façade is featureless.

The interior of Building No. 2895 was designed to support operational functions as well as meet the daily needs of the alert crews (housing, food, recreation). The ground floor level is organized around two north/south trending corridors, each of which end at tunnel entrances. Perpendicular to these two corridors (i.e., east/west) is three corridors equally spaced along the north/south length of the building.

These also end at tunnel entrances. All of the corridors have dropped, acoustic tile ceilings, fluorescent lighting and carpeted floors. Forty-nine single or double-occupancy bedrooms, three bathrooms [latrines] (one with a redwood sauna), an exercise room, a laundry room, and a television room are located on the ground floor. Most of the rooms are wallpapered with florescent lighting, a simple chair rail and carpeting.

The first floor level supported mission-related activity areas off a single corridor that runs the length of the building (north/south) and ends at tunnel entrances. The floor plan includes offices, a control room, storage rooms, a kitchen and dining room, auditoriums, two bathrooms, a television room, classrooms, a map room, and a soundproof, classified briefing room (in the southwest corner).

Alterations/Additions

Building No. 2895 has suffered only minor modification. Modifications include:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1960 | \$8,000 of unspecified modifications |
| 1975 | The briefing room in the southwest corner of the first floor was soundproofed |
| 1976 | A guard booth was constructed on the roof of the building, at the building's northeast corner, accessed via an open steel staircase on the east façade. |
| 1980 | Four windows were added.

A 10-foot by 20-foot redwood sundeck was constructed off the southeast corner of the building, and a set of double doors was installed off the dining area providing deck access. |
| Late 1980s | The building's entire interior was renovated (approximately \$65,000 in cost). This included new carpeting, wallpaper and painting throughout, and the installation of drop acoustic tile ceilings. Several minor changes to the floor plans also occurred during this renovation. The Mission Planning Room, in the northwest corner of the building (second floor), was changed to the Tanker Task Force Room (also known as the library). This change required the removal of several partition walls. At approximately the same time, three picture windows were installed: two on the west wall (flanking the entrance to Tunnel 14), and one on the north wall (near the building's northwest corner). The doorway into Tunnel 14 from this room appears to have been infilled at roughly the same time. Modifications completed to the kitchen during the late 1980's remodeling, resulted in Tunnel 17 opening into the kitchen, rather than into the main hallway for the second floor. Two bedrooms were also combined on the ground floor to create an exercise room. |

Various repairs and upgrades to the ventilation, electrical, plumbing, and fire control systems were also made from 1960 to 1988.

Function

The overall design of this building is representative of the Air Force's "northern tunneled" Crew Readiness Facility standardized configuration, which provided insulated personnel tunnels for rapid egress from the building to the Alert Apron. During an alert, aircrews would rush out the building's tunnels to waiting vehicles that would convey them to their aircraft. The aircraft were kept in a constant state of readiness, enabling the crews to fly combat missions at a moment's notice.

Significance

The end of World War II saw the beginning of hostile relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, based on differing social, economic, and political views. As this "Cold War" escalated, the United States instituted a policy of containment, which called for a "peaceful" blocking of the expansion of Soviet political and economic influence. Nuclear weapons, which had also developed at the end of World War II, held a significant place in this conflict, but it was theorized that an American nuclear capability, if strong enough, could deter unwanted soviet expansion.

On March 21, 1946, SAC was organized as one of the three new major commands in a reorganized Army Air Force. SAC was considered the "big stick" of U.S. National military strength, and was given the responsibility of delivering the atomic weapons. With the motto "Peace is our Profession" SAC was the physical realization of America's deterrence theory.

The newly established Air Force (established in 1947) embarked upon an expansive Cold War building program to make SAC operable. Air Force bases designated specifically for SAC were identified (or newly constructed) and became the exceptional instrument in SAC's mission of posing a significant deterrent to enemy aggression. Specially designed facilities were constructed at each of these facilities; among the most unique and identifiable were the Crew Readiness Facility.

In 1953, the detonation of a Soviet hydrogen test bomb as well as other Soviet successes with ICBM testing caused increased concern within the U.S. Department of Defense. Officials calculated only 15 minutes of warning time in the event of a Soviet missile attack—a figure that led to the institution of Ground Alert.

SAC Ground Alert required one third of the SAC force to be on continuous alert at any given time with weapons loaded and aircrews prepared for immediate launch. SAC's Commander in Chief, General Thomas S. Power, assumed that the brunt of any soviet attack would be directed at SAC and that the only way to insure SAC survival would be the ability to immediately launch a significant percentage of the force capable of a retaliatory strike. He wrote (in 1957) that the Alert Force was of the "utmost importance to the security and welfare of this nation and its allies in the free world." As a result, the SAC Alert Force formed the cornerstone of the American containment and deterrence policy.

The Crew Readiness Facility at Plattsburgh AFB was constructed in 1959 to support the SAC Ground Alert mission. It was an essential part of Plattsburgh AFB Cold War era activities and a critical element of Plattsburgh AFB SAC bomber and tanker operations. In addition, the construction of SAC Ground

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Alert facilities at Plattsburgh AFB between 1954 and 1959 produced a significant boost to the economy of Plattsburgh, New York, continuing the military's close association with, and economic support of, the community. Construction of these facilities resulted in the creation of over a thousand new jobs and added nearly \$135,000 a week to the local economy.

Drawings

Copies of as-built drawings for Crew Readiness Facility, Building No. 2895, are archived at:

Air Force Historical Research Agency/ISA
600 Chennault Circle
Maxwell Air Force Base, AL 36112-6424

Sources

Tetra Tech, Inc.

1995 *Survey of Cold War-Era Buildings and Structures at Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Clinton County, New York.* Prepared for the U.S. Department of the Air Force, Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence, Brooks Air Force Base, Texas.

United States Air Force

1959 Plattsburgh Air Force Base Real Property Accountable Record (1959-1989).

United States Air Force

1991 *Peace...is our Profession: Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command, 1957-1991.* Office of the Historian, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

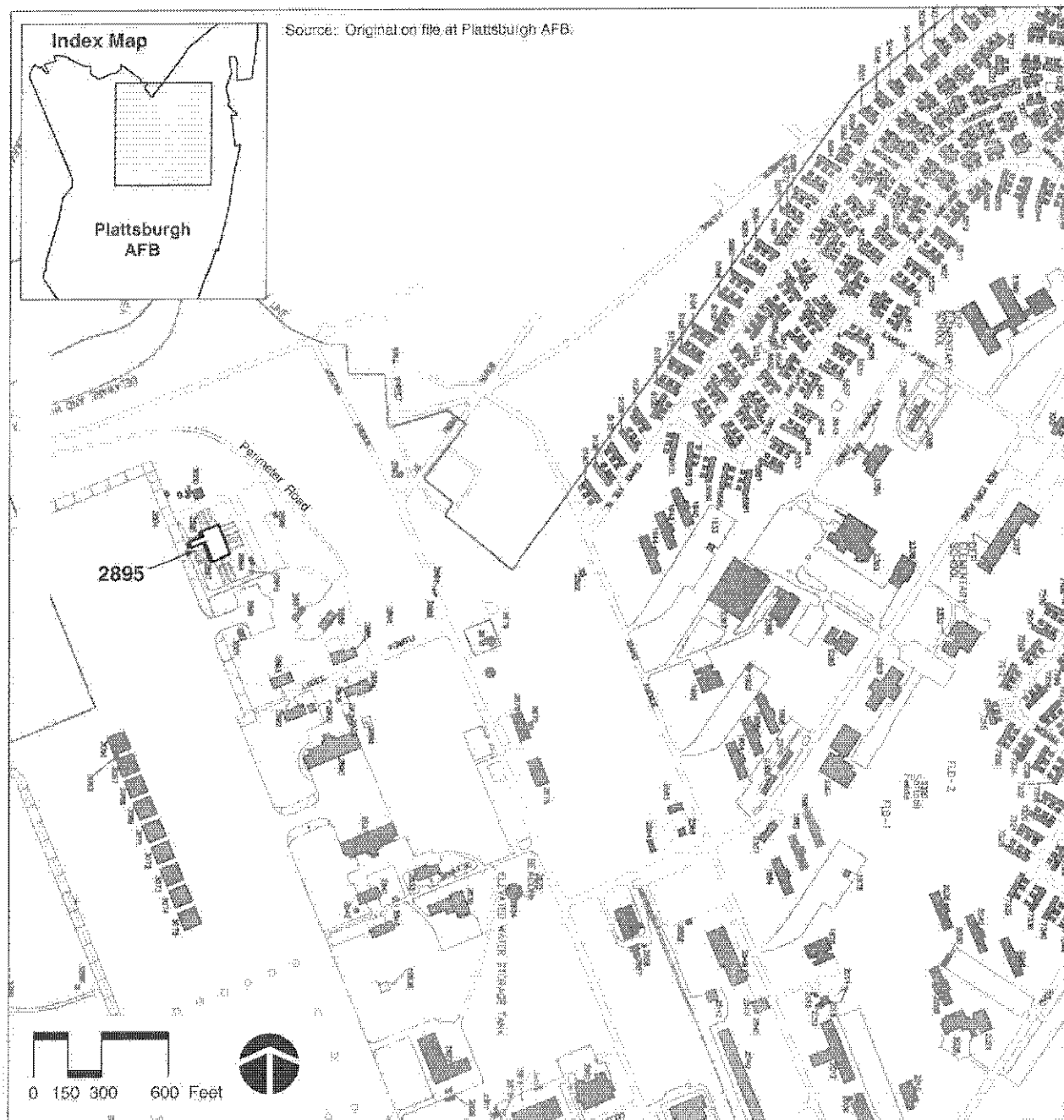
United States Air Force

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U.S. Department of the Air Force, Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence

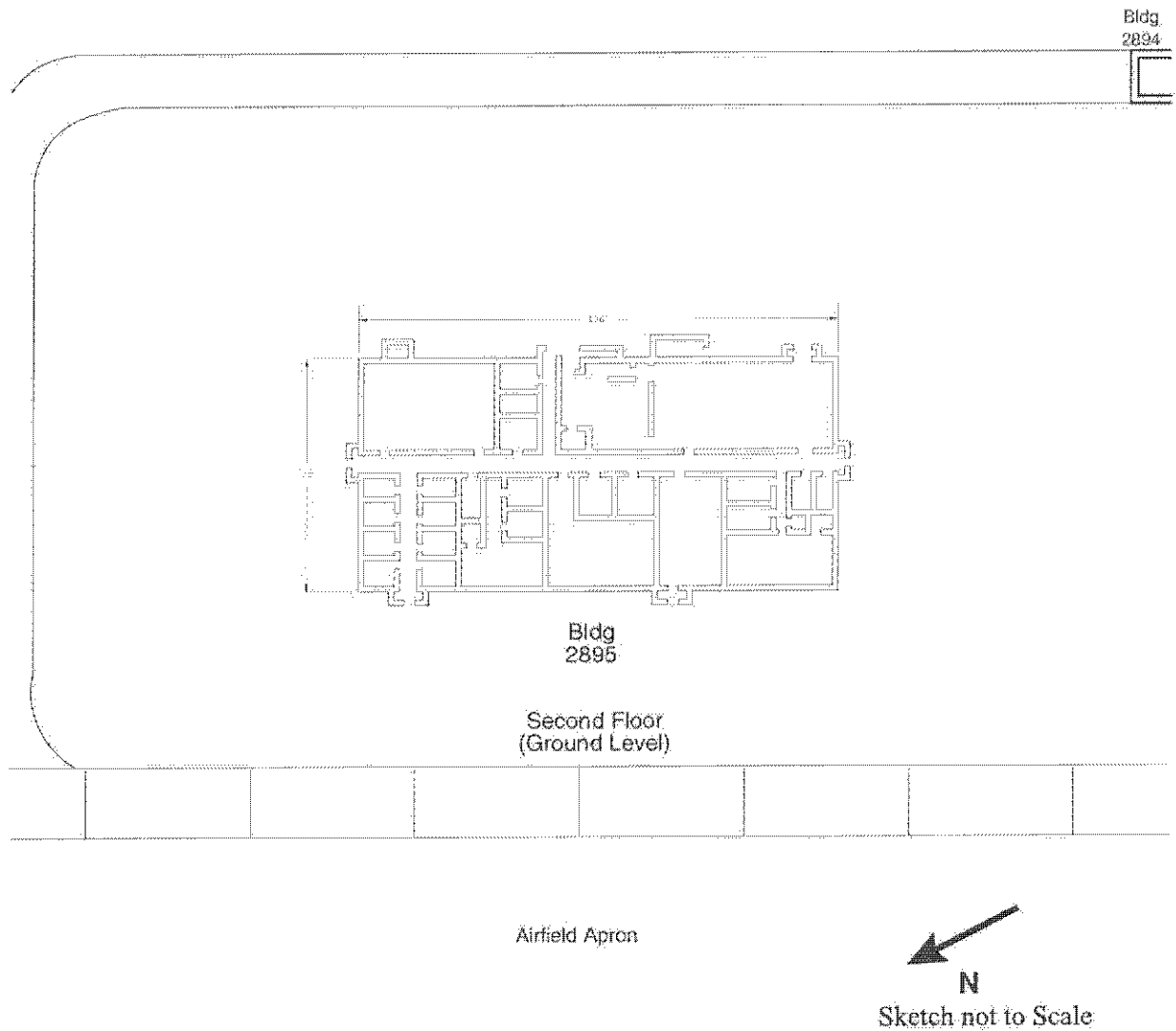
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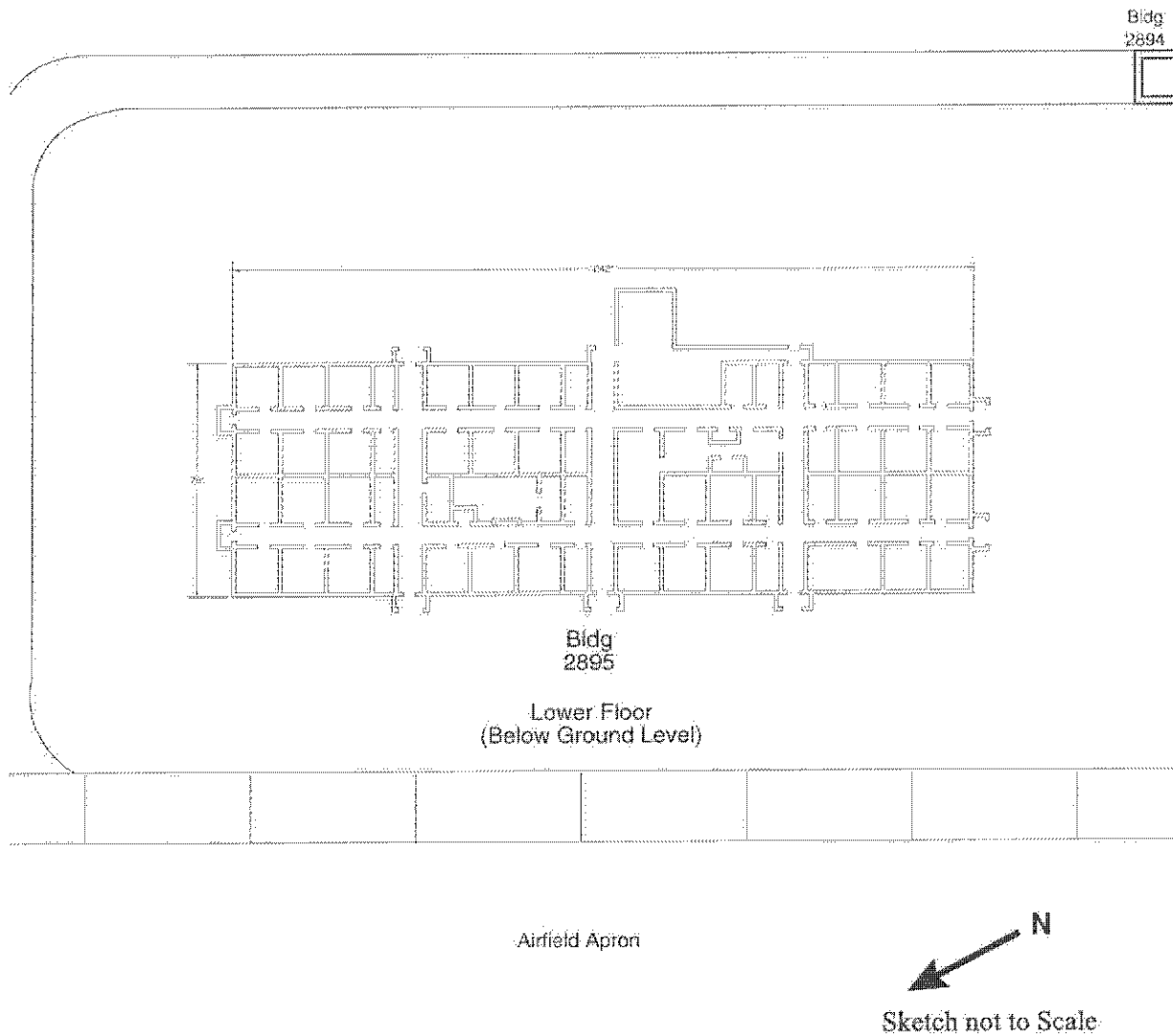
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SKETCH PLAN - CREW READINESS FACILITY - SECOND FLOOR/GROUND LEVEL
(Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Building No. 2895)
(Source: Plattsburgh AFB CAD File, Prepared by the United States Air Force ca. 2000)
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SKETCH PLAN - CREW READINESS FACILITY - LOWER FLOOR/BELOW GROUND LEVEL
(Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Building No. 2895)
(Source: Plattsburgh AFB CAD File, Prepared by the United States Air Force, ca 2000)
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